

BIOGRAPHY

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John Browne and His Treatise on the Muscles

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Melbourne.

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JOHN BROWNE AND HIS TREATISE ON THE MUSCLES.¹

By K. F. RUSSELL,
Melbourne.

JOHN BROWNE, the subject of this memoir, was a surgeon-anatomist who held the post of Surgeon in Ordinary to both Charles II and William III. He was the author of a number of books on surgery and one on anatomy; and as the latter work went through a relatively large number of editions, it is the one by which Browne is best known.

He was born in 1642 at Norwich, the birthplace of a namesake who was much more famous, the Sir Thomas Browne who wrote the "*Religio Medici*". Although both were acquainted with each other, they were not related.

His medical career started at Saint Thomas's Hospital, where he studied under Thomas Hollyer, and after a brief service as surgeon in the Navy, he settled at Norwich. Apparently coming under the notice of the King, he came to London in 1677 and was appointed Surgeon in Ordinary. After he had held this appointment for several years a vacancy occurred on the surgical staff of Saint Thomas's Hospital, and, armed with a letter of recommendation from His Majesty, Browne applied for the position. The governors of the hospital wished to fill the vacancy with an Edward Rice, who had given good service to the hospital during the great plague, but because of the King's letter they could not refuse Browne and he was elected on June 21, 1683. The governors' turn came, however, in 1691 when the surgeons of the hospital would not obey the regulations, and on July 7 of that year all the surgeons, including Browne, were asked to resign and others were appointed in their place.

Highly enraged over this proceeding, Browne appealed to the Lords Commissioners of the Great Seal, who called on the governors for an explanation, and when this was forthcoming, they gave a decision against Browne.

¹ Accepted for publication on July 28, 1939.

Later, in 1698, Browne made an unsuccessful attempt to be reinstated on the staff of the hospital. After the death of Charles II, Browne was appointed Surgeon in Ordinary to William III, which position he held until his death in 1700.

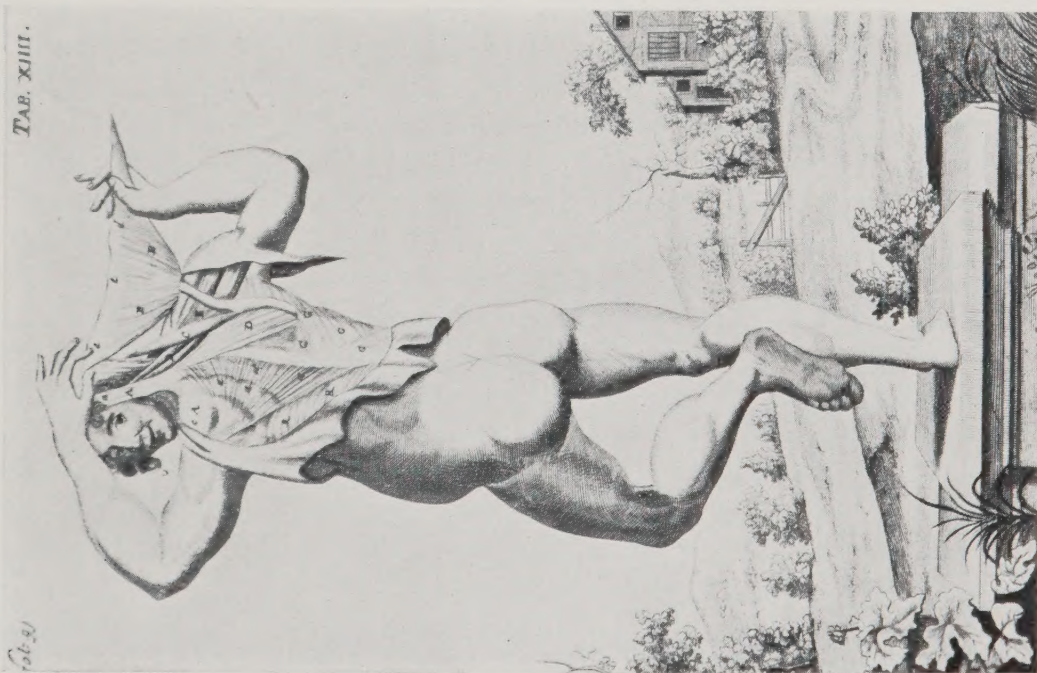


The following list is of his published works and the year of their appearance: 1. "A Treatise of Preternatural Tumours", London. 1678. 2. "A Complete Discourse of Wounds", London. 1678. 3. "A Treatise of all the Muscles", London. 1681. 4. "Adeno-choiradelogia: or an Anatomick-

Chirurgical Treatise of Glandules and Strumæ, or King's Evil Swellings. Together with the Royal gift of healing or Cure thereof by Contact or Imposition of Hands", London. 1684. 5. "The Surgeon's Assistant", London. 1703.



Edward Stanton
At the Saw and Crown
 in Lombard Street London
LANCET-MAKER
*Maketh and selleth all sorts of Surgeons
 Instruments Likewise Razors, Scissors, Penknives,
 Knives & Forks, Herve, Fleams, fine bone & steele
 Pins, Needles & fishkin Cases, & other Chirurgery Wares*
 NB Lancets and other Instruments Carefully Ground and Set



His treatise on the muscles first appeared in 1681, and its full title was: "Compleat Treatise of the Muscles as they appear in Humane Body, and arise in Dissection; with Diverse Anatomical Observations Not yet Discovered. Illustrated by near Forty Copper-plates Accurately Delineated and Engraven." This book was preceded in 1680 by a broadside advertisement sheet printed on August 28 entitled "Proposals for Printing a Treatise of Muscular Dissection . . . written by John Browne", and the book itself went

through the following editions, some being printed in English and some in Latin: London, 1681 (English); London, 1684 (Latin); London, 1687 (Latin); Lugduni Batavorum, 1690 (Latin); London, 1697 (English); London, 1698 (English); London, 1705 (English).

It is interesting to note that the 1687 edition was the first book ever to appear in which the names were actually printed on the muscles.

The book, one regrets to state, was not original; so few actually were in those days. The plates, indeed, were copied from a 1627 edition of Julius Casserius, but Browne had the disposition of the figures and the backgrounds altered so that the plagiarization was not too obvious. These illustrations, however, are the best part of the book, and it is doubtful if more whimsical or bizarre figures have ever graced a serious treatise on anatomy. One appears as an illustration to this memoir and shows a man standing on one leg on a pedestal very coyly demonstrating his trapezius muscle. The text is very sound and deals with each muscle in turn, describing its origin, insertion and action in the conventional manner.

Browne dedicated his work to the King and to Christopher, Duke of Albemarle, the latter dedication being couched in extremely subservient terms.

Although Browne borrowed the plates from Casserius without acknowledgement, this fact did not prevent him from obtaining a copyright issued by command of the King. This unusual and unorthodox proceeding he seemed rather proud of, for the text of the copyright appears very prominently in his book, and runs as follows:

“Charles by the Grace of God, King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith etc. To all Our loving Subjects of what Degree, Condition, or Quality soever within Our Kingdom and Dominions Greeting: Whereas it hath been manifested unto us, that Our Trusty and Well-Beloved John Browne Esq. one of Our Chirurgeons in Ordinary, hath not only with great Art, but at the Expense of much Time and Charge, delineated, described, and accurately engraved in Copper-plates an Anatomical Treatise of Muscular Dissection; which performance of his is to Our great liking and satisfaction, so that We may express Our Approbation thereof, and give him all due and ample encouragement for the future; We do hereby signifie Our Royal Pleasure, granting unto the said John Browne the sole Priviledge of Printing the aforesaid Treatise with its Copper Figures; and strictly Charging, prohibiting, and forbidding all Our Subjects to copy or Counterfeit any the Sculptures or Description aforesaid, either in great or small, or to Import, Buy, Vend, Utter or Distribute any copies or Exemplars of the same Reprinted beyond the Seas within the term of Fifteen Years next ensuing the Date of this Our License etc.”

The copy of the first edition in the collection of the writer ~~is probably~~ **unique.** It bears inside the front cover a copper-plate advertisement for a lancet-maker, one Edward Stanton at the Saw and Crown in Lombard Street, London, and dates from the period 1680 to 1700. A much reduced copy appears as an illustration.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

“Dictionary of National Biography”, Volume vii, 1886.

Humphry Rolleston: “Annals of Medical History”, Volume i (Third Series), Number 3, 1939, page 203.

